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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive 18-month career development program for administrators that was conducted by a state university is described. The program is based on the concept of personal growth contracting, which encourages individuals to accept responsibility for their own development by conducting self-assessments, preparing personal growth plans, and pursuing self-directed learning. The institution provides training in career management skills as well as learning opportunities both on and off the job. At the first workshop, each of the 52 participants completed four evaluation instruments: a Personal Development Practices Survey; the On-the-Job Development Questionnaire (Bare, 1981); the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1980); and a brief demographic questionnaire. Upon completion of the program, participants listed specific actions already undertaken or planned to foster personal development. It was found that participants increased their self-development activity significantly by the end of the program. The most active were persons having strong needs for promotion, higher salary, and job security. The more active were also the more highly educated in the group. The data suggest that the program primarily helped "plateaued," career-oriented professionals to search more artfully and actively for new jobs. (SW)

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RESULTS OF AN ADMINISTRATOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a comprehensive career development program conducted for administrators over an 18-month period by a state university. The program is based upon the concept of personal growth contracting.* The growth contracting process encourages individuals to accept responsibility for their own development by conducting self-assessments, preparing personal growth plans, and pursuing self-directed learning. The institution provides training in career management skills as well as learning opportunities both on and off the job.

Fifty-two persons completed the program. A formal evaluation disclosed that participants increased their self-development activity significantly by the end of the program. The most active are persons having strong needs for promotion, higher salary, and job security.

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* Bare, A.C., Making Growth Contracting Work, Journal of the College and University Personnel Association, 30, 4, 1979

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INTRODUCTION

In 1980, I reported one university's attempt to evolve a workable career development program for administrators (Bare, 1980). That paper summarized the knowledge gained from three program evaluations conducted during a four-year period. It concluded by describing an improved program to be offered during 1980-81. Today, I'm pleased to report our evaluation of the improved program.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The administrator career development process is illustrated in Figure 1. The introductory workshop is followed by a series of full-day workshops at monthly intervals. The workshops provide guided experience in self-assessment, career pathing, self-development planning, and specific skills identified by the participants as essential to their mobility or growth. Each participant makes a commitment at the outset to attend all the workshops, to produce a personal development plan and discuss it with her supervisor, and to take some self-development actions on her own behalf.

Content of the workshops recognizes the lack of vertical mobility at the university. Alternative

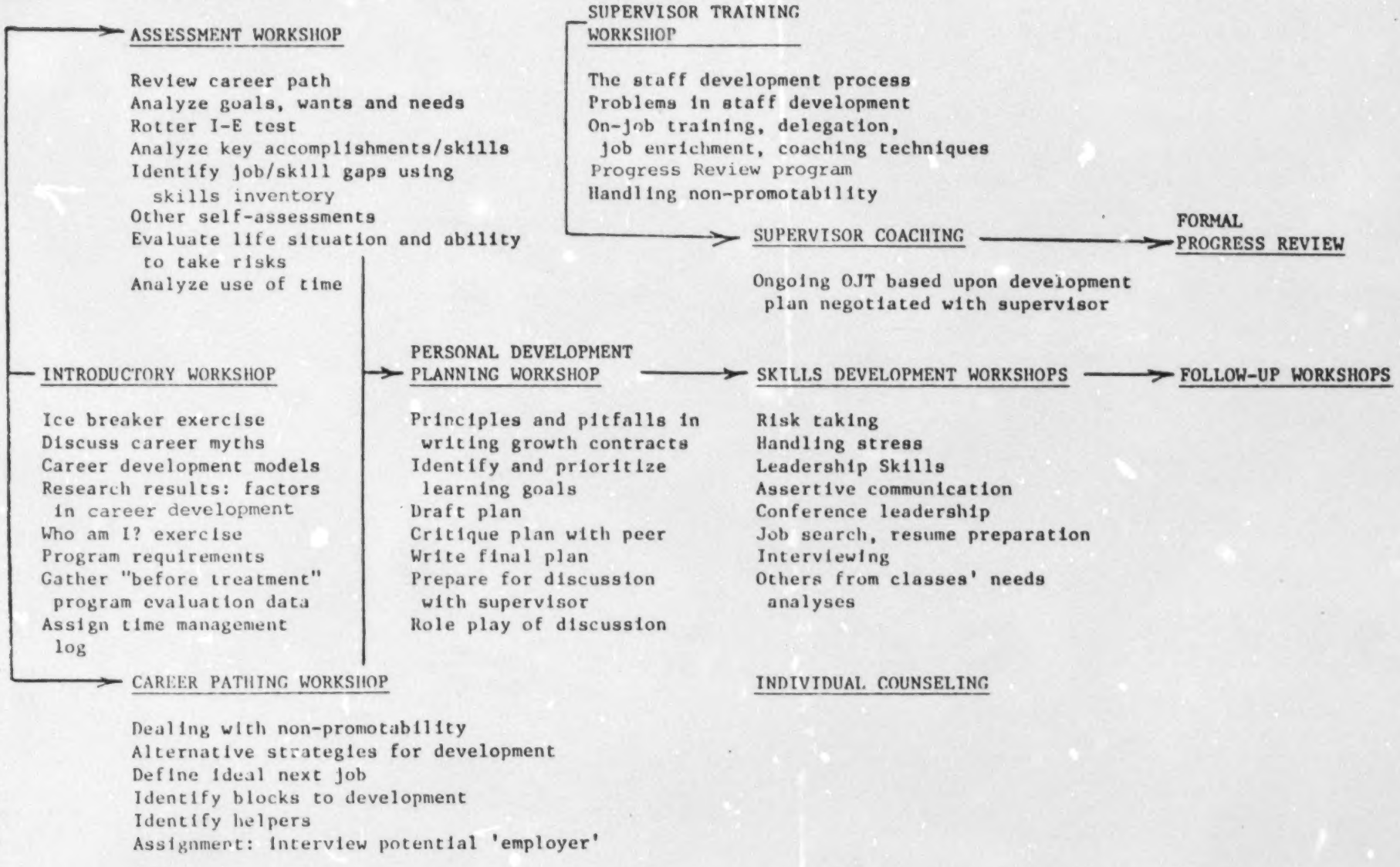

Figure 1. Career Development Program Elements

development strategies, such as lateral mobility, job enrichment, and off-the-job learning opportunties are stressed.

The workshop series is open-ended. Additional training in career management skills is provided depending upon needs identified during the program. To deal with expressed feelings of "burnout," modules on coping with stress are included.

Since they represent an important source of assessment information, and since they control on-the-job learning opportunities, participants' supervisors are involved in the program. Each participant invites her supervisor to a half-day workshop in techniques for developing staff on the job. Later in the program, each discusses her personal development plan with the supervisor and enlists the supervisor's help in providing learning opportunities on the job.

As shown, individual career counseling is provided in parallel to the workshop and on-the-job elements.

Follow-up workshops are conducted six months after the series ends. During these workshops, participants are asked to report on their accomplishments, to share the results of their attempts to find mentors and build networks, and to provide additional information used to evaluate program impact.

Enrollment was restricted to exempt (professional) staff. Of the 60 persons who volunteered for the program, 52 completed the entire 18 months (18 men and 34 women).

RESEARCH GOALS

This study had two goals: (1) to measure program impact and (2) to discover which administrators benefitted most.

RESEARCH METHOD

At the outset of the first workshop, each participant completed four survey instruments:

1. A Personal Development Practices Survey. This questionnaire asks each respondent to list whatever she is doing to enhance her personal development. (Personal development is defined as improving technical and interpersonal skills, improving feelings of competence, improving mobility, advancement and job success.) Responses are solicited in five categories of activity that our previous research suggested could encompass most personal development effort: (1) off-the-job hobbies or money-making activities, (2) getting on-the-job training or coaching from the supervisor, (3) getting one's job upgraded or "enriched," (4) seeking another job within the university, (5) seeking a new job elsewhere. This data provides a base-line measure of each participant's self-development activity before entering the program.

2. The On-the-Job Development Questionnaire (Bare, 1981). This instrument measures organizational supports to employee development, such as supervisory delegation and training practices, on-the- job development opportunities, reward practices, etc.

3. The Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). This questionnaire measures the respondent's needs for "psychological growth" and the extent her current job meets them.

4. A brief demographic questionnaire to record age, sex, education, length of service, time in grade, and salary level.

At the end of the program, each participant completed a second Personal Development Practices Survey. At this time they listed: (1) specific actions taken to foster personal development since entering the program and (2) actions planned between the end of the program and a follow-up workshop scheduled six months later.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The study tested four hypotheses:

1. That the participants would increase the number of specific actions taken to foster their development.
2. Persons having high levels of frustrated growth needs, as measured by the Job Diagnostic Survey, would initiate more activity than persons more satisfied in their current jobs.
3. Persons having supervisors amenable to on-the-job training, job enrichment and coaching, as measured by the On-the-Job Development Questionnaire, would initiate more self-development actions.
4. Persons having longer time in grade, lower rates of advancement, and those plateaued in higher salary ranges also would initiate more new activities.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To evaluate the impact of the program generally, the number of developmental activities reported by each participant before the program was compared to the number reported at the end. The results, produced by the paired T-TEST procedure of the SPSS computer program are presented in Figure 2. The figure shows a significant increase in all five categories of self-development activity at the end of the program.

Figure 2
Impact of Program on Administrator Self-Development Activity

Strategy	Means Pre	Post	Diff.	Significance
Enlist Supervisor in Development	2.71	3.90	1.19	.001
Try Spare-Time Activities	3.22	4.18	.95	.001
Try to Enrich Present Job	3.26	3.95	.69	.005
Seek New Job Internally	3.40	4.04	.63	.01
Seek New Job Elsewhere	2.86	3.25	.59	.02

Figure 3
Predictors of Self-Development Activity

	Mult.-R	R^2	R^2 Ch.	R	Beta	B
Psychological Growth Needs	.44	.19	.19	-.44	-.80	-.47
Level of Education	.59	.35	.15	.28	.50	.96
Instrumental Needs	.72	.51	.16	.03	.48	.31
					Constant	14.69

To test the remaining hypotheses, each individual's current and planned actions were summed to compute a total "self-development activity" score. These scores ranged from four to fourteen specific activities. Then, each individual's demographic data and questionnaire scores were regressed upon the total activity score to identify "predictors" of self-development effort. The regression analysis was conducted using the SPSS REGRESSION program.

DISCUSSION

As hypothesized, the participants reported increased self-development activity at the end of the program. Figure 3 shows the only three variables which predict the amount of that activity. Contrary to hypothesis, the most active participants are not those having frustrated needs for psychological growth. Rather, they are those having strong "instrumental" needs, that is, desiring "high salary and fringe benefits," "rapid promotions," and "good job security." As shown, the more active also are the more highly educated in the group.

Additional analyses disclosed that the more active individuals occupy significantly higher salary levels than those less motivated toward career development. Furthermore, the active persons tend to pursue development strategies aimed primarily at finding higher-paying jobs either within or outside the university.

The data suggest that the primary impact of the program was to help "plateaued", career-oriented professionals to search more artfully and actively for new jobs. This finding is consonant with the industrial literature on development strategies of mid-career managers (e.g., Bray and Howard, 1980). That research shows that status striving remains the primary focus of development longer into a person's career the more "successful" that career. Managers tend to perseverate in pursuit of upward mobility until lack of "success" manifests itself undeniably. Only then do pyramid climbers adapt to blocked mobility by seeking non-hierarchical paths to personal growth.

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